

Letter to the Editor

Social care services for addressing loneliness among inmates of old age homes

Sir,

Social isolation and loneliness among the elderly have garnered increasing attention in recent years. As more people live longer and age, there is a growing concern about the effects of social isolation on mental health and well-being. Social isolation and loneliness can lead to a range of negative physical and psychological effects, including depression, anxiety, and cognitive decline. These effects are particularly pronounced among elderly individuals living in old age homes (OAHs), where they may have limited opportunities to interact with others and maintain their social networks.¹

Family dispersion, reduced mobility and income, loss of loved ones, poor health, and loneliness are risk factors for social isolation and loneliness in elderly persons. It is believed that societal change, such as less intergenerational living, increased geographic mobility, and weaker community bonds, has also led to rising loneliness in the elderly population.^{2,3}

OAH inhabitants frequently deal with issues as a result of the OAHs' highly institutionalized, impersonal environment. The elderly residing in these facilities struggle to adjust to the strict and regimented routines, separation from their families, social isolation, anxiety associated with adjusting to a new environment, and frequent illness and death in the institutions. These factors make the elderly more prone to psychological issues. According to studies, the prevalence of mental health issues among the elderly is 64.4% in OAHs and 41.3% in the community.^[4] Hence, as mental health professionals, we would want to give useful strategies to the various stakeholders involved in elder care.

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

Encourage socialization among residents through organized group activities, such as crafting sessions or movie nights. The involvement of volunteers or family members in visiting and engaging with residents can help combat feelings of loneliness. Providing access to technology, such as video conferencing or social media, can allow elders to communicate with loved ones and stay connected with the outside world. Promoting and facilitating regular visits from family members can provide a sense of belongingness, emotional support, and social interaction for the elderly residents. Social events such as cultural festivals, music concerts, and movie

screenings can provide opportunities to engage with others. Organizing recreational activities such as group games and sports can promote physical and mental well-being, as well as facilitate opportunities for social interaction and networking. The support programs, including group therapies, counselling, and recreational activities, foster social interaction. Community initiatives and support play a crucial role in mitigating social isolation and loneliness among the elderly residing in OAHs. Community outreach programs such as health camps, adult day care centers, and social events provide opportunities for seniors to interact with their peers and form new connections. The implementation of awareness and education programs can be designed to raise awareness among elders regarding the importance of staying socially connected and the consequences of social isolation and loneliness. A collaborative effort is needed from Government bodies, administrators and staff of OAHs, family members of the elderly, NGOs, and community organizations to create policies, programs, and activities that promote social engagement, mental and physical health, and overall quality of life for the elderly in OAHs.

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